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Bureau of Land Management

Fact Sheet

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The Bly Tunnel at Eagle Lake

The Bly Tunnel near Eagle Lake has been the subject of considerable discussion in Lassen County over the past several years. Following are facts and a chronology associated with this issue:

- 1916: Eagle Lake reaches a historic high level of 5,125 feet above sea level.
- 1920: The U. S. General Land Office grants a right of way for construction of the tunnel by Leon Bly. Work begins in 1921 and is finished in 1923.
- The tunnel is 7,300 feet long and delivers Eagle Lake water into Willow Creek. It flows to the Honey Lake Valley.
- 1923-1935: Water flows continuously into the tunnel and the lake drops 27 feet during this time. There also are drought years which contribute to the decline. The inlet channel is deepened as the lake level drops. The water proves unsuitable for agriculture use because of its high alkalinity.
- 1935: The Tule and Baxter irrigation districts, which operated the tunnel declare bankruptcy.
- 1940: The Fleming v. Bennett judicial decree adjudicates Willow Creek water flows.
- Early 1950s. Eagle Lake reaches a level high enough for water to again flow into tunnel.
- 1955: Unknown citizen group builds a sand dike in the tunnel intake channel, stopping water flow into the tunnel.
- 1959: California State Water Resources Control Board revokes Tule Irrigation District's permits regarding the tunnel.
- 1973: BLM cancels the tunnel right of way across public lands.
- 1974: BLM fills the tunnel entrance.

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- 1977: State of California determines that intercepted spring flow in the tunnel is allocated to Murrer Ranch.
- 1980: The Eagle Lake Interagency Board of Directors (formed in 1976) adopts a position, later supported by the Lassen County Board of Supervisors, that Eagle Lake should be allowed to fluctuate naturally.
- 1986: BLM installs permanent concrete plug at about the midpoint of the tunnel with a pipe and valves to allow approximately five cubic feet per second (cfs) to flow through, in accordance with the water right opinion issued by the State of California in 1977.
- 2008: Drought causes continuing drops in Eagle Lake levels. Citizens are concerned that the bypass pipe plays a role in dropping lake levels, and file complaints with the State Water Resources Control Board asking that the pipe be closed. The board begins investigating the complaints.
- 2009: State Water Resources Control Board issues a letter stating it does not believe there are downstream rights to water flowing from the tunnel. This reverses the board's 1977 opinion. State Department of Fish and Game states that loss of lake water through the tunnel is insignificant, but BLM should analyze the impacts of curtailing tunnel water flow on Willow Creek habitat and fisheries downstream.
- 2010: BLM determines it will take no action on the request to close the valves on the bypass pipe, citing DFG statements about possible downstream impacts and uncertainties about tunnel hydrology.
- 2011: DFG asks the State Water Control Board to reduce export of lake water by closing the bypass pipe. State water board requests that BLM close the pipe, citing DFG concerns and stating the water release is an unreasonable method of diversion.
- Feb. 2, 2011: BLM closes and locks valves on the bypass pipe, citing water board and DFG opinions and determining there is no beneficial use of water from the tunnel.

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